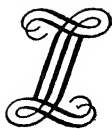


SWIFT ON HIS AGE



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SWIFT ON HIS AGE

Selected Prose and Verse

COLIN J. HORNE, *Lecturer in English, Leicester*

*In preparation*

BRITISH SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE IN THE 17TH CENTURY

# *Swift on his Age*

*Selected Prose and Verse*

EDITED BY

COLIN J. HORNE

*Lecturer in English*

*in the University College of Leicester*



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## FOREWORD

THIS series aims at presenting in an attractive form English texts which have not only intrinsic merit as literature, but which are also valuable as manifestations of the spirit of the age in which they were written. The plan was inspired by the desire to break away from the usual annotated edition of English classics and to provide a series of books illustrating some of the chief developments in English civilization since the Middle Ages. Each volume will have a substantial introduction, which will relate the author to the main currents of contemporary life and thought, and which will be an important part of the book. Notes, where given, will be brief, stimulating, and designed to encourage the spirit of research in the student. It is believed that these books will be of especial value to students in universities and the upper forms of schools, and that they will also appeal very much to the general reader.

VIVIAN DE SOLA PINTO

*General Editor*



## PREFACE

JONATHAN SWIFT is justly esteemed as the great satirist who could also write a good story. His common fame rests mainly on *Gulliver's Travels* and in a less degree on *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*. But these, his greatest writings, constitute a small portion of the total bulk of his work, much the largest part of which arose, like them, out of his lively and serious concern with the affairs of his age.

The purpose of this volume of selections from Swift's writings is to exhibit him in the setting of the Augustan age. As the above-mentioned books are easily obtainable and not neglected, it is thought that readers will be best served by confining the present choice to his less well-known writings, and including more of his vigorous verse than is usual in such a collection.

It is hoped that in this way the range and variety of his genius will be better appreciated. At the same time it is suggested that to follow Swift through the circumstances of his time and to inquire what his contemporaries learnt from him, to enter into his hopes for his age and to measure his disappointments, is the most salutary preparation for a reassessment of his importance as an author. For Swift was not a satirist all the time, and his satire must be read in the light of his positive principles of religion and politics, morality and human knowledge. To do this is also to learn more about the conditions of life and the trends of thought in England and Ireland during the first third of the eighteenth century than is perhaps to be gathered from any other single author. From first to last the distinctive features of Swift's mind are an acute under-

standing of the practical affairs of his age and an unshakeable adherence to principle.

In preparing the notes I have consulted all the editions listed in the bibliography; some of the pieces have not been annotated before. It is believed that no volume of selections from Swift has been so fully supplied with elucidatory matter since Craik's volumes, published sixty years ago, and that this will assist the modern reader to re-examine Swift's writings in the light of the eighteenth century.

I am grateful to Professor F. W. Baxter, Professor A. R. Humphreys, and Professor V. de S. Pinto for their advice, to the Clarendon Press and Sir Harold Williams for permission to use material from his edition of Swift's poems, and to the Keeper of the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum for permission to print from a manuscript of Swift.

C.J.H.



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## INTRODUCTION

### *THE AGE*

ENGLISHMEN of the eighteenth century, particularly the first part of it, had considerable confidence in themselves and an expanding pride in their country. After a century of political and religious conflict, they could at last reorder their affairs on the basis of the Revolution Settlement of 1689. Warned by the memory of a civil war, and heartened by their rapid recovery, they believed that they knew how to manage things better for the future. At the turn of the seventeenth century, Dryden, then in his last year, dismissed the old age of war and change with relief, and some disillusion:

'Tis well an Old Age is out,  
And time to begin a New.<sup>1</sup>

Younger men hopefully welcomed the new era.

There was sound cause for this confidence. The tolerable and tolerant way of life now emerging from the strong swell of passion, and still not firmly secured, appeared as no mere fortuitous turn in history. It had come about through the capacity of Englishmen to learn from distressing experience and to apply their minds to the science of government. Above all, it was based on their practice of moderation, and on a capacity to get on together while permitting a diversity of political opinions and religious creeds.

They did not misjudge themselves. The eighteenth century was on the whole an age of enlightenment and good sense, justly pleased with its escape from the excesses of tyranny and

<sup>1</sup> *The Secular Masque* (1700).

fanaticism alike. Educated men had a sound understanding of their world, approved its cultural and social standards, and knew what satisfactions they wanted from it. Locke was the representative philosopher. An advocate of peace and an exemplar of the power of calm thought, he demonstrated both the capacity and the limitations of the human mind, insisted on the primary importance of sound education, vindicated the power of the people against the theory of the divine right of kings, promoted religious toleration, and argued for the reasonableness of Christianity.

For most men the clear evidence of a new and better state of life was to be seen in two distinctly English achievements. Constitutional government under a limited monarchy and the latitudinarian compromise in the Church of England were proof enough that they were in advance of the rest of the world. There is no cant in their constant acclaim of English liberty. To their causes for satisfaction must be added the advances of the new science, the general prosperity at home, the rapid extension of their empire and trade abroad, and the enhanced power of England in European politics. The discoveries of Newton about the nature of the universe, far from giving a shock to their system, seemed only to confirm their conviction of a divinely ordained order in all things. Within that order their commercial enterprise could happily operate.

Many Englishmen believed that their country was now at the height of its history, beyond which a fair plateau of ordered culture and prosperous enjoyments opened out before them. Men no longer felt the need to agonize for a better state; they had only to realize the benefits of the world they already possessed. Underneath all party issues in Church and State could be found a solid basis for agreement. For some men this comfortable view involved the conviction that in their time and country the classical ages were renewing themselves in a Christian setting. To others it suggested a new philosophy of

human progress, according to which the steady accumulation of knowledge had carried modern man far on in advance of earlier ages. There were still others who were sceptical of both views, and challenged the new optimism as a shallow complacency which mistook irrational novelties in religion and learning for improvements on the ancient world. For this was a critical age, and its criticism was often grounded in conservative beliefs. Men like Sir William Temple, disciplined by the traditional and aristocratic modes of learning, took classical culture as their standard, while hesitating to accept the possibility that it could be reproduced in the modern world. The evidence of many of the vaunted modern achievements seemed to them to prove just the contrary.

Jonathan Swift, while drawn for a time during the reign of Queen Anne into some sympathy with the first of these three groups, stood closest to the last, and was contemptuous of the philosophy of progress. The belief that the English tradition was now being consummated in a society that could rival the glories of Greece and Rome is well illustrated by the following passage from Jonathan Richardson's *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715):

Whatever degeneracy may have crept in from causes which it is not my present business to inquire into, no nation under heaven so nearly resembles the ancient Greeks, and Romans as we. There is a haughty courage, an elevation of thought, a greatness of taste, a love of liberty, a simplicity, and honesty amongst us, which we inherit from our ancestors, and which belong to us as Englishmen; and it is in these this resemblance consists.<sup>1</sup>

Swift shared this faith, up to a point. It was his ambition to write the history of the reign of Queen Anne, and one argument that he seriously advances in his *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712) is that this

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in *Before the Romantics*, edited by G. Grigson (Routledge, 1946), p. 204.

glorious reign "ought to be recorded in words more durable than brass, and such as our posterity may read a thousand years hence, with pleasure as well as admiration." Just so Horace and Virgil had celebrated the reign of Augustus. Swift's own age did not need praise; he could serve it better by checking its evils, and thereby making it more worthy of record. Unlike Richardson, Swift considered it his present and perpetual business to inquire into the causes of the degeneracy that had crept in, and to use his powers to arrest them. The need was greatest when the corruptions of Walpole's administration took hold upon the nation.

With a critical spirit such as his, Swift was born in the right age; not simply because no age could more deserve his satire, but because, in principle at least, it approved of criticism. It was an age that understood and accepted the power of the human intellect to control the conduct of human life. Criticism was seen as a necessary and positive function of society. The satirist, indeed, if he is to be more than a jester or carper, if he is actively to shape the features of his age, must be firmly attached to positive values—not so much ideals, as convictions to which he gives intellectual as well as emotional assent; not personal singularities, but standards of behaviour capable of correcting the aberrations of his time.

### *SWIFT'S PRINCIPLES*

Before proceeding to an examination of the particular specimens of Swift's writing brought together in this volume, it will be as well to set down some of the basic principles that these writings disclose. These principles are not a matter of inference only. Swift's purpose being didactic as well as critical, his work when viewed as a whole will appear at least as much expository as satirical. If he rarely goes deep in his expositions, he is always eminently clear and convincing; his opinions are at

times delivered so simply and forthrightly that we, habituated to his irony, may be misled into suspecting their sincerity or their efficacy. In truth, when we dodge round his irony—and, it should be observed, irony was not his permanent habit of mind, or his only way of grappling the reader to him—his counsels appear to be as sound, as sane, and often as moderate, as any we can find in the age. It is not violence or a perverse hatred of life, but a consistently rational understanding of his age and a courageous insistence on his rightness, that distinguish the genius of Swift.

To speak summarily, he was above all a Christian, a humanist, and a moralist, conservatively attached to the central tradition of European civilization. This involved an unquestioning acceptance of the simple truths of Christianity, especially as taught by the Anglican Church. There was nothing he believed in more steadfastly or more deeply, and to ignore this fact is to obscure the affirmative side of his criticism. More will be said of it farther on.

His traditionalism involved also an admiration for the order and refinement of the classical way of life, the foundations of which, he insisted, were the teachings of the Greek moral philosophers. "Corruptions," he observed, "are more natural to mankind than perfections." This typically Christian pessimism, with its awareness of evil warring on the good, he unflinchingly accepted, while placing it on the rational basis of a conflict between reason and passion, as others like Milton had done before him. In this he accorded with neo-Stoicism, acclaiming the lesson of those Greek moralists who had demonstrated, as he said, that "Passion should never prevail over Reason." Reason, it should be added, was for Swift rather the recognition of innate good sense in mankind than any great trust in the ratiocinative powers of the human mind.

Admiration of the ancient world did not altogether imply a distrust of his own age and country, as his acceptance of evil

did not mean a rejection of ordinary humanity. The English Constitution and the Revolution Settlement were acceptable facts, so long as they were operated for the true end of government, the good of the State as a whole, and were not subverted to the limited service of party and the self-seeking of powerful individuals like Marlborough and Walpole, or even at times his own superiors in the Church. Decent living was what he sought for men. Justice and liberty were its guarantees, a sound moral and rational education was its instrument, Christianity and the classics supplying the precepts, history confirming and illustrating them.

Finally, his life was ennobled by a love of individual men, with a fierce hostility to the passions of mobs and the selfishness of sectional interests as its corollary, mobs providing the fools, and parties the knaves who exploited them. Unconvinced as he was by the current acceptance of a philosophy of progress, and opposing to it his belief that the fundamental nature of man, like the universal truths derived from reason, is unchanging, he was nevertheless committed to no static view of civilization. If man cannot advance far, he can all too obviously lapse into barbarism, and that was the constant threat he saw in his age. It was a danger to which "the rudeness of our northern genius" (a frequent axiom of Swift's) made Englishmen peculiarly liable.

It is not contended in stating these leading ideas that Swift was a profound thinker. He was in fact scornful of metaphysics and all speculative philosophy, such as the contemporary absorption in problems of will and intellect, simple and complex ideas, matter and motion, and the like. He objected, as he did likewise to the investigations of some of the scientists, that such exercises of the mind were too remote from practical affairs to have any use. Unaware, or unwilling to admit, how much his own thinking had been affected by Locke, he frequently sneered at him, though the antipathy is to be explained



partly by his greater aversion to the atheists and free-thinkers who were appropriating Locke's theories to weaken traditional Christianity and sometimes to justify downright immorality.

Swift was, however, notably well read in ancient and modern authors, the obscure as well as the great. In the years he spent in Sir William Temple's household between 1689 and 1699 he had more than made good his failure to get the best out of his university education in Dublin. Thereafter he ranged less widely, for he knew by then what was worth reading, and was more concerned with the practical affairs of England and Ireland and the conduct of his duties in the Church. In the common life of his age there was little that escaped his observation; he knew it precisely and fully. All the evidence confirms the report of Lord Orrery:

I always considered him as an *Abstract and brief chronicle of the times*; no man being better acquainted with human nature, both in the highest, and in the lowest scenes of life. His friends, and correspondents, were the greatest and most eminent men of the age. The sages of antiquity were often the companions of his closet: and although he industriously avoided an ostentation of learning, and generally chose to draw his materials from his own store; yet his knowledge in the antient authors evidently appears from the strength of his sentiments, and the classic correctness of his style.<sup>1</sup>

### RELIGION AND LEARNING

Though none of his earliest writings is included in this volume, something must be said about Swift's remarkable entry into the world of letters. His powers came rapidly to maturity during his three periods of residence with Sir William Temple between 1689 and 1699. That maturity appears in the two works written towards the end of that time, though not

<sup>1</sup> *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift* (third edition, 1752), p. 213.

relieve his patron Temple from an embarrassment. At the same time, he saw the wider relevance of the dispute to the religious issue. The controversy about the superiority of Ancients or Moderns, arising in Europe as a consequence of the Renaissance, and exciting renewed interest in the France of Louis XIV, had been touched off in England by Temple's essay *On Ancient and Modern Learning* (1690). It is doubtful if anyone in England seriously contested the superiority of classical literature. But Temple's arguments had gone beyond that, and sought to disparage modern science and philosophy. This was the concern of the Royal Society, which accordingly authorized the brilliant young scholar William Wotton to defend its cause in his *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (1694). The fight was on, though it was soon diverted to a more restricted quarrel about the authenticity of the Epistles of Phalaris, which Temple had praised as an example of the superiority of the oldest books.

Modernism is Swift's butt in *The Battle of the Books*; the Phalaris controversy merely provides the occasion. Our applause is given first to the vigorous mock-heroic narrative of the battle "that happened on *Friday* last between the *Antient* and *Modern Books* in the *King's Library*," and is thereafter sustained by its aptness at every point to the dispute. Ultimately the book is more memorable for the seemingly incidental fable of the spider and the bee, and the mock-epic intervention of the "malignant Deity, call'd *Criticism*." This last is the genius of the Moderns, scientists, philosophers, and authors alike, as Swift perceives them. The goddess recalls Milton's formidable figure of Sin, as no doubt Swift intended she should. The disgusting offspring of Ignorance and Pride, and sister of Opinion, she breeds a horrid crew named Noise and Impudence, Dullness and Vanity, Positiveness, Pedantry, and Ill-Manners. With this animated allegorical group Swift stigmatizes the corruption of the faculty of reason. That it has degenerated since

ancient times is further insinuated in the wittily characterized discourse between the modern spider and the ancient bee, where the distinction, summed up in a moral spoken by Æsop, is between the sweetness and light of the old and the dirt and poison of the new.

It was probably at this time that Swift returned to *A Tale of a Tub*, now binding into it by way of digressions his vigorous assaults on the proud novelties in learning of "this polite and most accomplish'd Age," and enlarging on themes that had appeared in his early verses. Religion and learning, he saw, had progressed down the same slope to corruption. A combination of materialism and irrational enthusiasm, aggravations of man's innate depravity, by threatening the orthodoxies of religion and learning portended an age of folly and atheism. To the modern reader the *Tale* may seem confusing by reason of its complex structure and those qualities that Dr Johnson noted in it, "a vehemence and rapidity of mind, a copiousness of images, and vivacity of diction." But there is no mistaking, for all its brilliance, the earnestness of Swift's antipathy to enthusiasm and excess of all kinds. Enthusiasm was at the time almost a technical term for the belief in a personal revelation of the divine Will and the religious frenzy it often evoked among the Dissenters, and Swift makes play with the deviations in personal morality and political action that it led to. To this unchecked exercise of the religious imagination he links the scientists' trust in the evidence of the senses, both of them illusions of the modern age. All such innovations are revealed in the end as related forms of madness in a commonwealth, for

when a Man's Fancy gets *astride* on his Reason, when Imagination is at Cuffs with the Senses, and common Understanding, as well as common Sense, is Kickt out of Doors; the first Proselyte he makes, is Himself, and when that is once compass'd, the Difficulty is not so great in bringing over others; A strong Delusion always operating from *without*, as vigorously as from *within*.

The restraints upon such delusions, it is implied, can be found in the sanities of classical culture and the Church of England.

By the age of thirty Swift had laid bare the presumptions of the day with a sharp realism and a remarkable grasp of traditional knowledge. *A Tale of a Tub*, one of the most original of books, is also one of the most allusive and most conservative, but every idea is freshly examined by the test of what it amounts to in terms of human behaviour. Inquiries about the nature of man in relation to the universe were irrelevant. The nature of man seemed obvious enough: capable of reason and goodness, of sweetness and light, but ever and anon given over to sin and folly. Swift's experience of worldly affairs was as yet limited; the ample experiences of his subsequent career confirmed his early view and strengthened his endeavour to hold sin and folly in check. How that worked out in practice the pieces printed in the present volume will show.

### CHURCH AND STATE

Swift has recorded that he gave much study to the nature of government, yet had "dealt very little with politics, either in writing or acting, till about a year before the late King William's death." Government he had studied as much from the records of history as from the books of theorists. In this pragmatic approach he was to find himself in sympathy with Bolingbroke. For both it was the history of England since the end of the fifteenth century that was most instructive, the period for which, as Bolingbroke later put it in his *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, "modern history is peculiarly useful to the service of our country." Yet it was to classical history that Swift, as a supporter of both the Ancients and the Whigs, turned first for instructive parallels with the politics of his own age.

These are set out in *A Discourse of the Contests and Dissensions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome* (1701), his first intervention in politics referred to above, and they are applied in the defence of the Whig lords after an attempted impeachment by the Tories. William III had always found more reliable support among the Whigs, heirs to the Puritan parliamentarians, than among the Tories, still at that date High Church and largely Jacobite in sympathy. Swift was a High Churchman too, and, as we have seen, detested Puritan dissent; but unlike many Tories he completely accepted the constitutional principles of the settlement of 1689. He had good cause, quite apart from the impression made upon him by Temple's politics. As an Anglo-Irishman he knew at first hand those miseries of civil warfare that were only an historical memory for most Englishmen, and he was bound to honour William of Orange as the saviour of Protestantism in Ireland, and to fear the Pretender for the opposite reason. The Revolution, with all its dangerous consequences, had been justified by the public good. Much as he came to detest the first two Hanoverian kings, Swift never wavered in his acceptance of the Protestant dynasty.

In the latter half of 1708 he was engaged on a group of writings that give versatile expression to his views on religion, and more particularly on the relation of Church and State in England. These were (i) *The Sentiments of a Church-of-England Man, with Respect to Religion and Government*; (ii) *An Argument to Prove, that the Abolishing of Christianity in England, May, as Things now stand, be attended with some Inconveniencies*, etc.; and (iii) *A Project for the Advancement of Religion and the Reformation of Manners*. The titles indicate their different approaches. The *Sentiments* is a thoughtful statement of his views, bringing theory to the test of historical experience; the *Argument* is a dexterously ironical comment on some features of the situation; the *Project* is a set of practical proposals for the reform

of social morality by the co-operation of Church and Government.

*The Sentiments of a Church-of-England Man* is a document of central importance for the understanding of all Swift's writings. It is possible that he wrote it as early as 1704, at a time when the political parties were frantic over the attempt of the Tories finally to shut out Dissenters from public office by their Bill against Occasional Conformity. However that may be, the sentiments expounded, without any of the exaggeration or the tendentiousness of his polemical writings, are those of an independently minded and honest man. They remained essentially unaltered throughout his life, and whenever afterwards he writes political and religious satire, these are the standards he assumes as the measure of the good and reasonable. As the numerous references in the tract to the events of the time are elucidated in the notes to the present volume, the discussion can be limited here to his statements of principle.

Swift would never allow that there was any profound mystery about the science of government: its practice required only diligence, honesty, and a moderate share of plain natural sense. Though as a realist he allows that men are just as naturally given to faction, it is a tendency that must be controlled. To the extreme views of both parties of the day, and the provocations they produce, he had the greatest aversion. Always parties are a form of factious enthusiasm, built on contention rather than on a disinterested search for truth. The claims of conscience, justice, and patriotism are to be put before loyalty to party, which can never raise men much above personal interest. He was most favourably placed by his connexion with both parties in the reign of Anne and the influence he acquired with the Tory Ministry from 1710 to 1714 to observe the early growth of the modern party and Cabinet system, and he was never happy about it. He saw, indeed, so much lying and personal dishonesty associated with party struggles that he very

excusably failed to foresee the superior advantages of the emergent system as the safeguard of the Constitution and the liberty of all elements in the state. In the *Sentiments* he seems to be offering to the political leaders an alternative system in which they can unite to form a party to end all parties.

It was stability and security within the state that he sought, while failing to see that any system of universal conformity may produce a new form of tyranny. Arbitrary power of every kind he considered a greater evil than anarchy, thereby making the retort direct to the central tenet of Hobbes, so influential in the seventeenth century. He rejects alike the despotism of a Stuart king and the supremacy of a Puritan oligarchy, though he is gentler in his argument with the supporters of divine right and passive obedience, treating them as a set of high-minded but misguided men. They have made the mistake of confusing the legislature and the administration. Against their extremism he argues that the power in the state must remain with the people as a whole, and to ensure this, power must be balanced among the three estates, king, nobles, and commons. The freedom of the whole consists in an absolute unlimited power of the legislature, the parliament of Lords and Commons, and a due limitation of the executive function of the monarch and his Ministers. The view is stated still more precisely in his *Remarks* (1707) upon Tindal's *Rights of the Christian Church*. He would even allow the right of Parliament to abolish the Established Church, though he stresses what a calamity that would be for England, where Parliament and the Church are so happily identified in representing the genius of the nation.

The principle of toleration, so essential to the peace of the new order in England, he affirms less readily and with several important reservations. In the first place a distinction is made between an unlimited liberty of conscience and an unrestricted expression of opinion. Individuals may think as they please so long as they do not promulgate their opinions

in a way that might discompose the harmony of the state. Further, he compromises, rather grudgingly, by accepting the sects already tolerated (while firmly opposing the rise of new ones) but excluding them all from public office and participation in government.

*An Argument against Abolishing Christianity* was the only one of Swift's pamphlets at this time, apart from the Partridge papers, where he was not confining himself mainly to direct exposition and argument. It is indeed one of his great satirical pieces, less exuberant than *A Tale of a Tub*, which in passages it often recalls, but by its perfect assurance and control of the ironic manner more efficient in achieving its purpose. The *Sentiments* and the *Argument*, when seen together, set in brilliant juxtaposition Swift's two main styles, and he was now master of both. The one, expository in manner, wins confidence by its evident frankness and convinces the reader by the cool lucidity and orderly disposition of its reasoning; the other, apparently less dogmatic and equally calm in manner, is in fact more decisive, assuming the attitudes of his adversaries only to reduce them, with every appearance of innocence, to the last absurdity. In this use of the *reductio ad absurdum* Swift had discovered the basic form that he was to use in all his great satires. The one manner builds up a positive structure of reason; the other is a process of demolition, where reason is the wrecker.

In the *Argument*, "one of the most felicitous efforts in our language to engage wit and humour on the side of religion" (it is Sir Walter Scott's description), Swift risks misunderstanding of his own position as a devout Christian by pretending to accept the reasonableness of the free-thinkers in rejecting real Christianity, while deferentially pointing out some of the inconveniences that will result unless a nominal Christianity is maintained. Thus he counters the popular free-thinkers like Asgill, Tindal, Toland, Coward, "and Forty more," and all



those rakes like the Earl of Wharton who found in this liberty of opinion a convenient justification for licence in their morals. At the same time his irony reaches down beyond the Deists and the libertines to "the strong Reasoners" and "the Deep-Thinkers of the Age," the disciples of Hobbes and Locke, and drags up into the light the whole policy of Latitudinarianism within the Whig party.

The unabashed rejection of the supernatural elements of Christianity and the advocacy of natural religion represented a serious despiritualizing of orthodox faith and tended finally, as Swift genuinely believed, to atheism. His own practice of religion, it is true, was marked by no spiritual raptures. That is not to say that he was anything but a normally devout man, worshipping in obedience a God whose justice was the commanding fact in the mystery of his being. About the mysteries of religion Swift precisely stated his own position later in *A Letter to a Young Gentleman, lately entered into Holy Orders*. Mysteries are natural to divinity, and as they are mysteries, it is not God's intention to make them intelligible to men. Man's duty is therefore to accept them implicitly, the clergyman's to teach them, without attempting to probe and explain. The requirements are plain and easy for a pious Church of England man, and he puts them first, as indisputable, of his *Sentiments*: "whoever professeth himself a Member of the Church of England, ought to believe a God, and his Providence, together with revealed Religion, and the Divinity of *Christ*."

In the *Argument* Swift had related the undoubted depravity of his age to the general decline of piety. *A Project for the Advancement of Religion and the Reformation of Manners*, not included in the present volume, is a comprehensive guide to those depravities among all classes in the age of Anne. The lack of worldly knowledge when he wrote *A Tale of a Tub* had now been supplied by residence in London, where he had become an accepted wit and man of letters in Addison's circle.

On its appearance this anonymous reforming tract was hailed by Steele in the *Tatler* for the wisdom and piety of its author, a man "whose virtue sits easy about him, and to whom vice is thoroughly contemptible." But his contempt does not abide in a puritanical denunciation; the least sympathetic reader of Swift must allow that there is neither sneering nor misanthropy here. An unblushing and unblinking review of the vices of the time is accompanied by a set of practical proposals for a reformation, many of them anticipating later developments in State control and revealing that authoritarian strictness in Swift's nature that distinguishes it from the simpler humanity of Steele and the gentler persuasiveness of Addison.

Reformation is to begin at the top, and he appeals to the Queen to exact higher standards from her courtiers and Ministers (they were Whigs at the time), and to withhold favour and promotion from the recalcitrant. It must include the improvement of education in its three aspects—the inculcation of moral duties, the knowledge of arts, and bodily exercise. In his most pessimistic years Swift never lost his faith in education as a corrective for man's natural degeneracy; it is a conviction that should not be overlooked in estimating the positive values in his satirical view of life. Finally, he demands more missionary zeal by the Church and greater respect for the clergy, who must mingle more with the laity and win esteem and love by their behaviour. He believed that he was making his own contribution by his appearances during these years on the London scene, and by the more active part that he was now taking up in politics.

### ENGLISH POLITICS

Opposed to faction as he was, Swift nevertheless allowed that in certain junctures a man must decide for one party, and such a juncture will occur when his attempts to mediate between both parties have failed. The pamphlets that he wrote in

1708 were a clear warning to the Whigs, who had so far given little encouragement to Swift as a political counsellor, or as a clergyman seeking remission of the payment of first-fruits by the Irish Church and a chance of professional advancement for himself. He was at the same time deeply apprehensive of Whig endeavours to win the support of the Dissenters by their repeated rejection of the Tory Bill for Preventing Occasional Conformity and their evident desire to remove the Sacramental Test in Ireland. Between 1699 and 1708 Swift resided alternately in both countries, and saw the Established Church threatened in both. The Whigs, moreover, included many supporters who despised the clergy and the universities, and were often libertines and free-thinkers themselves. It was his growing awareness of these things that forced him without any change of principle to transfer his support to a Tory party that by 1710 seemed purged of Jacobitism and genuinely concerned to maintain the establishment of the Anglican Church.

When Swift returned to England at the beginning of September 1710 a big change was imminent in politics, and it gave him his opportunity to achieve a political eminence attained by few previous English authors. His success was not a matter of luck. It was the recognition of the singular compulsion of a vigorous personality and a powerful mind, acting through private counsels on the leading Tory statesmen and through the Press upon a responsive public, that sought as never before to be instructed. To understand this changed situation it is necessary to make a brief review of the relations of the two parties from the beginning of Anne's reign, and the attitude of each to the War of the Spanish Succession that had begun at that date.

Arising out of the disputed claim to the Spanish throne, the war was in effect a struggle to curb the mighty power of France and to share out the rich Spanish empire. As such it was the culmination of the lifelong policy of William III, who had pre-

pared for it with the Grand Alliance between England, Holland, and the Austrian Emperor, with many of the German princes in support. The main campaign of the war up to 1709 was fought in the Netherlands by Marlborough with brilliant generalship. Yet, despite the steady exhaustion of France, ultimate victory eluded the Allies, largely because the Spanish people had come to prefer the French nominee, Philip of Anjou. The dynamic of the war on both sides had run down, and by 1709-10 the Tories saw their opportunity to regain power and bring the war to an end. Their support for the war, never very enthusiastic, had steadily diminished as their resentment at the cost of it increased. As the result of increased taxation the cost, they maintained, fell chiefly upon their supporters among the landed men; while the merchants and stockholders among the Whigs profitably extended their holdings in the National Debt.

It was the unreliability of the Tories, in fact, that had driven Marlborough steadily over to the side of the Whigs. Queen Anne, a devout supporter of the Church, had replaced William's Whig lords with a High Church Tory Ministry that included Marlborough and the Earl of Godolphin. While Marlborough led the fighting, it was Godolphin's task to find the money to pay for it, and they were united in trying to avoid serious dissensions at home. That meant conciliating the Whig merchants and the Dissenters. One result was the Act of Union in 1707, made possible by diplomatic concessions to the Scots. Another was the curbing of the Earl of Nottingham and the extreme Tories by frustrating all attempts to pass the Bill against Occasional Conformity and replacing them in the Ministry by the more moderate Harley and St John. After 1705 Marlborough and Godolphin moved closer to the Whig Junto, and between 1706 and 1708 replaced their disgruntled Tory colleagues with the intransigent Whig lords. The result was a fierce revival of party strife. Whigs and Tories were henceforth sharply separated by their attitude to the Church and to

the war. The injudicious impeachment of the High Church Dr Sacheverell in 1709 made the Whigs appear open enemies of the Church and rabid persecutors of their opponents, with the result that in the general election of the following year an excited electorate rallied to the Tories.

In this crisis both parties were eager to back their intrigues at court with popular favour, and both recognized the value to them of the newly established journalism. On arriving in London Swift found himself courted by both sides, and his decision was easy. His writings on Church and State in 1708-9 make it quite clear why he could no longer support the Whigs. Henceforth until 1713 his hope was to strengthen the Church and re-establish peace and prosperity in England by his support of the new Government. The progress of those hopes and his day-to-day activities are recorded in his correspondence and in the private pages of his *Journal to Stella*. His devotion to Harley and St John, and especially to the former, was founded on a belief in their personal virtues as men faithful to the Church and loyal to the Protestant succession. He saw in them the possibility of a new attitude in politics, a moderating and middle element between the money-seeking and irreligion of the Whigs and the Jacobite principles of the old Tories.

His new work began at the end of October when he took over the *Examiner*, the newly established paper by which the Tory leaders hoped to counter the Whig propagandists and advance their own policy. Swift carried out that task with a sense of duty, not simply to a party, but to the country as a whole. More clearly than any of his contemporaries he perceived how entirely the welfare of England hung upon the integrity of her statesmen, and by his sincerity and his great skill as a publicist he was able to communicate that awareness to all classes of the community, so that, says Dr Johnson, he "must be confessed to have dictated for a time the political opinions of the English nation."

In his first number he changed the line of the paper, declaring his connexion with both parties and announcing his intention to be an independent Examiner of the dangers into which the one party had led the country, and of the claims of the other to direct it in greater safety. It was his opportunity to vent his inveterate dislike of faction while making it appear that the disaffected Whigs were factious against their own country, and otherwise unfit for office. At the same time he had to reassure those who still thought of the Tories as the party of arbitrary government, sympathetic to Pope and Pretender. Always he is aware that he is appealing to many men not committed to any party, and though he speaks from the centre of government his appeal is directed beyond London to every corner of the land. The skill with which he managed this was something new in journalism, and it is not too much to claim that the response to his appeal secured the Tory Government in office. He gave a new seriousness to party spirit by his critical attention to every detail in the political events of the day, and added dignity by his repeated assertion that political action is to be judged by the same moral standards as apply to individual behaviour.

Regarded as writing, the virtue of these papers is in their plain competence even more than in the occasional brilliance of their satire. Their persistent urging of the moderate policy of the new Government (still a coalition) is enlivened by the ingenuity that finds such a variety of ways to reiterate the same narrow range of arguments, turning every occasion into an arresting proof of the need for that policy. The offenders are usually allowed to go unnamed, but Wharton and Marlborough never. It is always made obvious when they are being shot at, for in their abilities lay the last strength of the Whigs; moreover, Swift had sincere reasons for hating both, the one having the advantage of position and talent to license his profligacy, the other being a national hero whose greed

for money and power might pass unchecked amid the popular acclaim.

His second *Examiner*, of November 9, shows how immediately Swift achieved mastery in his new work. Party condemnation of the Whigs appears as a commanding homily on Political Lying. It surpasses most party pamphlets by the dexterity of its insinuations, and at its peak the contemptuous indictment of Wharton allies the reader with the writer in his concern with great moral issues.

By April 1711 Swift's main efforts in the *Examiner* were directed to preparing the nation for the peace with France that the Government had been secretly negotiating. To further this end he handed over the now authoritative *Examiner* to others, and turned to the preparation of his greatest political piece, *The Conduct of the Allies*. Carefully prepared from State documents and the private communications of Ministers, this decisive pamphlet was published on November 17, 1711. It was at once overwhelmingly successful, and, reaching so many thousands of readers throughout the country, prepared the way as nothing else could have done for the acceptance of the Tory peace policy. If it is not always strictly fair in its arguments, it at least achieved a praiseworthy end. Swift's private desire to be revenged on the Whigs was submerged in his inspiring conviction that peace was the greatest need of a country that for a generation had been habituated to think of war and rising taxation as inescapable conditions of existence.

From a characteristically judicial opening, analysing the aims of war in general, with particular illustrations from England's history, he proceeds to uncover the origins of the present conflict and to trace its progress. By firm argument and stinging sarcasm he implants a conviction that England has borne all the cost and done most of the fighting, while her allies have secured all the advantages. A powerful concentration of facts and unrelaxing logic brings him to the cause of English gulli-

bility: the country's good has been bartered for the private advantage of the Whigs, Marlborough, Godolphin, and the moneyed men behind them. Thus baldly stated, the case would appear hopelessly unconvincing; in the pamphlet itself nothing seems lacking for a complete proof. In a conclusion blended of irony, eloquence, and simple appeal, he calls on all Englishmen to renounce the Whigs and make an immediate peace as the only chance left to avert national bankruptcy.

To the bulk of his readers the pamphlet must have been utterly convincing, the only true and intelligible account they had had of the events of the last ten years. The Whigs had nothing to set against it, nothing to equal Swift's talent as a historian, his command of all the evidence, above all his power to communicate his sense of outrage until he turns even the genuine achievements of his opponents into the objects of their disgrace. He had saved the Government again. The resolutions in favour of peace were carried through Parliament, and the whole debate echoed with the words of this handbook of policy, prepared so eloquently for the purpose.

On the field of politics Marlborough had been finally outgeneralled. He was dismissed from all his offices on December 30 and Swift danced in exultation over his great adversary to the tune of his allegorical lampoon *The Fable of Midas*. It is often said that Swift had been excessively malicious towards Marlborough, and it is true that Marlborough's reputation has never entirely been washed clean of the devil's mark that Swift daubed on it. Privately Swift respected his talents and could pity his disgrace; but his avarice, his ambition, and his pride, that satanic sin that Swift both hated and feared, were not to be condoned. Ten years later, when Marlborough died, Swift had not changed his opinion, and made out the Duke's passport for hell in the *Satirical Elegy on the Death of a late Famous General*. But that was not written for publication; the public oration had been made long since. The later verses were a



moral homily, and, despite their monumental tone, were essentially a private comment. As such they confirm the view that Swift's animus had always been at bottom a genuinely moral one.

All seemed set fair for a long period of Tory government under Harley and St John (now Earl of Oxford and Viscount Bolingbroke respectively), in which the country could thrive on the peace, finally concluded in 1713. But it was not to be. Oxford and Bolingbroke were soon quarrelling about the future of the party and the succession to the throne, the more forceful Bolingbroke soon outdistancing the cautious and procrastinating Oxford in Jacobite intrigues. Of these treasonable moves Swift seems to have known nothing; but he did see with increasing despair that the Ministry was doomed. Part of the record of his forebodings may be read in the *Journal to Stella*. After all his endeavours, faction was rampant again, and for himself he had secured no better recompense than the deanery of St Patrick's, in Dublin. From there he returned to London in September 1713 in a vain endeavour to reconcile the two men from whom he had hoped so much.

If he could not again save the Tories, he could at least hold off the ruin till another day by setting himself against the resurgence of Whig attacks. It was this political need that led him on from a personal quarrel with Steele to a bitter public contest. This reached its fiercest in January 1714, when Steele was preparing his sharpest attack on the loyalty of the Ministry in his much advertised pamphlet *The Crisis*. Swift quickly anticipated him with his jaunty imitation of Horace, *The First Ode of the Second Book of Horace Paraphras'd*, in which he seeks to discredit *The Crisis* in advance by a bantering ridicule of its self-proclaimed author. Nevertheless, *The Crisis* came out, and its open declaration that the Protestant succession was imperilled was more seriously, but no less spiritedly, blasted in Swift's prose pamphlet, *The Public Spirit of the Whigs*.

Swift could achieve no more. He waited in England until the death of the Queen in August cast the Tories under the feet of the Whigs, meanwhile writing two noble pieces of self-vindication against the detractors in Church and State who could never forgive him "his dang'rous Wit" and conscious superiority. They were the poems *The Author upon Himself* and the *Imitation of Part of the Sixth Satire of the Second Book of Horace*. Private pieces, written for the solace of himself and his friends, these poems were not published at the time. The first of them is so vituperative in places that its publication would have offered his head to the vengeful Whigs. As it was, Swift went in fear of his life, and many years were to pass before he appeared in print again. So great was his downfall.

It was the Whigs who now entered upon the long period of power that Swift had hoped to secure for the Tories. To Oxford and Bolingbroke he was still faithful through all his disillusion; by the success of the Whigs and the ultimate ascendancy of Walpole he was embittered for the rest of his life. *An Enquiry into the Behaviour of the Queen's Last Ministry*, on which he was at work as late as 1721, is the epitaph on his political career in England. It is more than that, for he conceives the sudden turn of events as a great tragedy, the tragedy of two statesmen he loved, and the tragedy of a whole nation, henceforth controlled by men whose rule was the negation of all those principles of personal honour, public morality, and religious piety which he had striven to implant in the life of England. It must never be overlooked that the indignation that burns through the remainder of his writings was not just the expression of personal frustration but the defiance of a defeated champion, condemned to behold the triumph of knavery and the acquiescence of fools. In this he was not unlike the Milton who wrote *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*.

Swift's defiance took the form of social satire, hereafter

be effective the clergy must be able, through a liberal education and devotion to their pastoral duties, to command greater respect than was generally accorded them. Just as Swift always presented the smaller immediate issue by reference to the greater end in view, so the *Letter* involves his conception of the proper use of learning, in which, as we have already noted, he found the classical writers a better guide than the pedantry of the moderns, better even than the early Fathers of the Church, and the best comment on the moral teaching of the Gospels. At the same time it is an expert discourse on prose style, in which he demonstrates his own standards of good writing and gives an invaluable lesson on the most common defects of prose in his day. While he makes his case against the corruptions that grew up with the Ciceronian mode, he looks back for his model to the plainer prose of the seventeenth century. The result is an admirable instance of his didactic manner, untouched by the dangerous obliquities of irony.

Committed now to a life in Ireland, he could not remain unmoved by Irish affairs. The events of the seventeenth century had left a situation there very different from that in England, and one that gave less satisfaction with the Revolution Settlement and less confidence for the future. After insurrection and the conquest of the native Irish, followed by confiscations in favour of Protestant settlers from England and Scotland, there were by the eighteenth century three main elements in Ireland, the Anglo-Irish rulers, the Ulster Presbyterians, and the native Catholic Irish, all of them more sharply separated by antecedents and interests than the factions in England.

The punitive measures, intensified after 1690, had effectively crushed the natives, depriving them of nearly all property and means of livelihood and scarcely allowing them the exercise of the religion to which they clung. They lived in abject poverty, often in conditions of life unknown in England, and roamed in

their thousands as beggars. Though a majority of five-sixths in the kingdom, the Catholics had no way of improving their lot, and could no longer be a real danger to the security of Ireland or England. In the government of their country they were allowed no share, and the leaders who might have rallied them were dispersed abroad, many of them in the armies of foreign states. Swift certainly did not fear them, but like the rest of the English overlords he despised these "poor Popish Natives" for their "Laziness, Ignorance, Thoughtlessness, squandering Temper, slavish Nature, and uncleanly Manner of Living." Yet he was not indifferent to them. The calls of justice and compassion, ever strong in his nature, were roused by the conditions around him until he was forced to see these miserable people as victims of the time, not wholly irreclaimable. He insisted—it was his permanent belief about all mankind—that education and a system of rewards would be at least as effective as privation in raising them "to a less savage manner of life."

The disabilities of the Presbyterian planters were less severe. They had to pay tithes to the Established Church, they could not sit in Parliament, and until the Toleration Act of 1719 they were excluded from all public offices. Against these restrictions were to be set their ability as enterprising farmers, tradesmen, and manufacturers, and the prospect of political amelioration held out by the dependence of the English rulers upon their support to keep the Irish in subjection. Swift had lived among them at Kilroot, and feared them as a challenge to the supremacy of his own kind in Ireland, as enemies to the Church, and as representative of the old Puritan fanaticism. For them he had least sympathy, and he did all he could to check the inevitable growth of their power.

The Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, to which Swift belonged, was centred in Dublin, and maintained as the instruments of its power the Irish Parliament, the Government offices, and the

Anglican Church. But its members, English by descent or birth, by living in Ireland were denied many of the benefits of the Revolution that they would have enjoyed in England. They were subject to control from England, exercised through the Lords Lieutenant, the right of the English Government to make all appointments in Church and State, and the limitations upon the functions of their own Parliament. In 1720 an Act of the English Parliament reasserted the dependency of Ireland, which was in fact looked upon as a colony to be plundered for the benefit of England. To this end a series of restrictive measures had been enacted to prevent Irish agriculture and manufactures from competing with English interests. Prohibitions on the provision trade disrupted Irish economy by forcing a change-over to enclosures for growing wool, with a consequent drop in employment of Irish labour and the displacement of tenant-farmers. When the export of woollen manufactures was also stopped, the landlords, many of them absentees concerned only to maintain the incomes from land that enabled them to live comfortably in Dublin or England, let loose unscrupulous middlemen to rack-rent their tenants.

With the rampant commercialism of the Whigs after 1714 the subjection and impoverishment of Ireland began to be felt even among the Anglo-Irish. It was a policy that split the Ascendancy. In place of a party division between Whigs and Tories there was now a new alignment of interests. On the one side were the Anglo-Irish who had been born in the country and had held it against the invasion of James II. On the other were the Whig nominees, the agents of Walpole, "the gentlemen sent from the other side to possess most of the chief employments here." Swift's resumption of political activity was to provide the leadership and the binding force that the emergent Irish party lacked.

It is often said that Swift was an Irishman by birth and an Englishman by sympathy and interest. Such a contention

misses the real point. Certainly he resented having been born in Ireland, and yet, by birth, education, and the fact that he spent most of his life there, he was a genuine Anglo-Irishman; and when Ireland as a whole was oppressed by England, his innate loyalty to the Anglo-Irish led him to recognize that all elements in Ireland must unite in a common interest. His satisfaction at giving a check to his old enemies the Whigs went deeper than motives of revenge. The nature of Walpole's government confirmed his earlier case against the Whigs, and his old principles could now be reasserted in the Irish cause on the firm grounds of humanity, pain at the sight of misery, and indignation at the infringement of political liberty.

There is plain evidence that his concern for Ireland long antedated his hostility to Walpole. In *The Story of the Injured Lady*, written probably in 1707, at the time of the Union with Scotland, he complained that Ireland, the maiden betrothed by England, had been betrayed for an unlovely Scots mistress. His *Letter concerning the Sacramental Test* (1709) had challenged English interference in Irish affairs. By 1720 he had a clear case against England, and his campaign opened with *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*. He no longer hoped to effect anything by an appeal to England, or even by direct attack; it is the Irish he upbraids, for their supineness, as he seeks to arouse them to a militant self-respect and self-dependence. Law, religion, and common humanity can be re-established only by their own actions. They have at least one remedy in their hands, to reject and renounce everything wearable that comes from England and to use only their own manufactures. Swift's urge for action was reasserting itself in the first stage of a boycott that leads on through a series of lesser tracts to his great triumph with the *Drapier's Letters*. In the meantime events were preparing the situation for him.

Ireland had no mint of its own, and the right to issue a coinage for the country was a prerogative of the King. It was

to England, therefore, that the Irish Government had to look, as in other matters, for an improvement in the currency, for which more coins of the smaller denominations were needed. Nevertheless, it came as a surprise to Irishmen, whose wishes had not been consulted, when on July 12, 1722, a Patent was granted to William Wood to mint and distribute a new copper coinage in halfpence and farthings for their country. Wood was an enterprising English business-man of dubious character, and the transaction had undoubtedly involved both bribery and political manoeuvring. This, however, was not the cause of the spontaneous outcry that arose in Ireland against the Patent. A new spirit seemed to have entered into the people, and their pride spoke at last against the continued impositions from abroad, a pride supported by real fear that their commerce would be further impaired by this latest act of English government. In September 1723 the Irish Parliament met for the first time since 1715, and both Houses immediately protested against the Patent.

But the King and his Ministers were little used to hearing Irish protests, and showed no readiness to heed them. By the beginning of 1724 it was becoming clear that the Irish leaders would give way. At this point Swift decided to intervene and turn to effect the new impetus of Irish unity before it should dwindle away. In a succession of rousing pamphlets, written in the assumed character of M. B., a Dublin draper, and hence known as the *Drapier's Letters*, he worked up the whole Irish nation to such a passion of protest as could no longer be ignored.

The first of the *Drapier's Letters* appeared in March 1724, addressed to the ordinary people of Ireland, the shopkeepers, tradesmen, and farmers. With his singular skill for isolating the essentials of a situation, Swift puts the plain facts of the Patent before them, and in business-like calculations appropriate to an honest draper demonstrates the injurious conse-

sequences of the new coins upon the purses and livelihood of all classes. The time had come for united action, for another boycott. The King, he argues, has an undoubted right to issue such a Patent and his subjects have by anciently established law an equally clear right to refuse the money. The people of Ireland must "stand to it One and All: Refuse this *Filthy Trash*." Though Swift was immediately recognized as the author, the skilful assumption of the plain man's manner was exactly calculated, as it is in the narrative of the seafaring surgeon Gulliver, to win the trust of all classes. With the flimsier fuel of songs and ballads he kept the bonfire burning round Wood, while in the four further Letters that rapidly followed, Swift extended his argument to the principles underlying the dispute, the rights of the Irish nation in relation to England. Two other Letters kept in reserve were not needed. Prosecution of the printer and the offer of a reward for the 'discovery' of the author whose identity every one knew only made the upholders of the English Government more hateful and ridiculous. The Patent was withdrawn in August 1725. The Irish party had won its first victory, and Swift was "the Darling of the populace."

For the rest of his life he remained their hero, and through all his disappointments he never quite gave up his attempts to drum some practical wisdom into the Irish, who except on the one occasion of Wood's halfpence proved so incapable of helping themselves. Returning despondent from his last visit to England in 1727, he wrote bitterly in the privacy of his notebook the poem on Ireland, "this land of slaves," who in their readiness to be duped by England seemed more contemptible than the politicians who profited from their debasement.

At the same time the poem foreshadows his further participation in Irish affairs with an appeal over the heads of the authorities to the self-interest of common men. He was now



regarded as a local oracle, and the response he made in letters and pamphlets to those who consulted him, though often neglected by the modern reader of Swift, must make him a first-class authority on the economic conditions of the time, and win our admiration both for the soundness of his proposals and the foresight with which he planned for the improvement of the whole country. A good specimen of this aspect of his work is provided by *An Answer to Several Letters* (? 1729) with its realistic schemes for repairing roads, draining bogs, and generally improving agriculture, subjects that had long engaged his attention. It is false to think of him in these years as surfeiting his gloom on the sight of the misery around him. He had good advice to give, and he readily gave it where, because of his established prestige, it might in some measure be heeded.

A knowledge of these activities is essential for the just appraisal of the most famous and the most seriously misunderstood of all these pamphlets, *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of poor People in Ireland, from being a Burden to their Parents or Country* (1729). His ironical proposition is a horrible one; but the conditions that prompted it were more horrible still. After three years of famine the misery of the poor was extreme. Writing with deadly calm, as if he were putting forward just another of his practical schemes for the economic betterment of Ireland, Swift lays bare the causes of this suffering in Irish apathy and English callousness, and by his shock treatment seeks to arouse both sides to an awareness of their moral guilt. To understand this aright is to understand the power of Swift's humanity at its true measure.

Compassion for the common people, mainly Catholics, and concern with the economic problems of the entire country did not lessen his preoccupation with the cause of the Anglo-Irish and the Established Church. His inveterate mistrust of the power of the bishops and his own middle station in the Church made him particularly suspicious of the Irish episcopate, a body

composed largely of Whig nominees. When in February 1732 the bishops introduced into the Irish House of Lords "two abominable Bills, for enslaving and beggaring the clergy," he determined both to rescue the lower clergy from personal injustice and to curb the arrogance of their masters. His poem *On the Irish Bishops*, with its fiery denunciation of their greed and pride (whatever we may allow for personal spite), was entirely consonant with his lifelong endeavour to uphold the dignity of his fellow-clergy and to promote the pastoral efficiency of the Church.

It is no part of the present scheme to examine the culmination of Swift's genius in *Gulliver's Travels*. It must suffice to remind the reader that he was hard at work on that book between 1721 and 1725, the years in which he was giving so much of his energy to the cause of Ireland. That eagerness for the betterment of one section of mankind is reflected in several parts of the greater work. More important than that, *Gulliver's Travels* is the ultimate restatement of his view of human nature, expressed long before in *A Tale of a Tub*. It is also the summary of his whole career, and is the more memorable for being built out of all his experience. It gives the most challenging statement of the principles he had maintained in all his writings, through hope and disillusion. His insight into the real affairs of men, scientists and politicians, kings, beggars, poets, and Ministers, his scorn of fools and detestation of knaves—all is summed up in *Gulliver's Travels*, and any judgment that does not take into account what he had written elsewhere is likely to be distorted. Swift was no misanthropist. He was too much involved with the world about him, he cared too much for mankind, to hate it entirely. His principles of virtue and wisdom are precisely stated and enforced everywhere in his writings.

## CONCLUSION

Positiveness of opinion and clarity of expression—these are qualities no one will deny to Swift. It should be easy, then, to make a just assessment of him. In fact it is not so, and never has been. The most diverse and conflicting judgments have been delivered. He excites in modern readers, as he did in contemporaries, reactions positive even to the point of violence: disgusted reprobation for his naked exposure of the animal in man or exhilarated delight in the acuteness of his wit; fascinated horror at the savagery of his indignation or tragic pity at the spectacle of his frustrated power and ultimate madness. It is fatally easy to be sentimental one way or the other about Swift. Despite the work of a large company of scholars who in our own day have been most fruitfully concerned with his importance as statesman, thinker, and writer, there yet remains among less searching readers a certain horror of the man.

Many reasons can be assigned for the diversity of judgments upon him, as for the warmth of feeling that sometimes accompanies them. Much of the confusion arises from the very nature of satire. The concern of the satirist must be with the actualities of life. He may approach them obliquely himself, and yet he must push his reader's nose hard up against them in their diseased and perhaps exaggerated forms. If the enemies of the satirist are vice and folly, the permanent obstacle to his success as a reformer is human complacency. Humour, Swift allowed, when writing of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, "is certainly the best ingredient toward that kind of satire, which is most useful, and gives the least offence; which instead of lashing, laughs men out of their follies, and vices." He has abundance of humour himself, particularly in his verses and in *Gulliver's Travels*, and the laughter he produces is not always of a wry kind. In practice, however, and when he was purposefully

out "to mend the world," as he was so often, he found that humour alone could not shift the bastions of folly or stir the still waters of complacency. His endeavour then was to vex his readers, not to divert them, and his method most often was to shock them on the sudden and to force in them a recoil from the object of his calmly ironic consideration.

Such procedures have their dangers for the satirist, and Swift has not escaped them. In the first place he may alienate the sympathy of the reader, an inquisitive but timid creature. Again, irony is an uncomfortable tool, too tricky for many people to handle or appreciate, and the reader may, mistaking the direction of the satirist's cleverness, identify him with the unpleasant things he exposes. It happened thus to Swift early in his career over *A Tale of a Tub*, and it cost him a bishopric at least. It happens to him still among readers of his *Modest Proposal* whose stomachs turn at his suggestion of fattening the children of the poor for the tables of their betters, and among those who are nauseated by his scatological references. These and other notorious passages are taken out of their contexts of irony and all too well remembered in an isolation where they appear only disgusting.

Swift too often disturbs his reader, whose support he should enlist, more than the subjects of his satire. The reason may be that he took too little account of the instinct of self-protection. "Human kind cannot bear very much reality." We fear the clear sight of the man like Swift who habitually shows us more than we wish to see and strips away all the pretences which, by covering the horrors of life, make it just bearable. Our defensive reaction is often to project upon him our own perversities and unacknowledged guilt.

For some or all of these reasons Swift has often appeared a perverse hater of life. Concentrating attention on the irony, Dr Leavis finds in his work chiefly "the spectacle of creative powers . . . exhibited consistently in negation and rejection,"

and concludes that his intensity as a writer was purely destructive.<sup>1</sup> It is a judgment that underrates Swift's challenge to the evil things in his age and the positive counsels of good that he opposed to them.

Other readers are unduly affected by aspects of his life about which our evidence is inconclusive: the nature of his more intimate relations with Esther Johnson (his accomplished and much loved Stella) and with Esther Vanhomrigh, his other *protégée*, who seems to have conceived for him a passion that he did not wish or dare to reciprocate. Others again see the shadow of his ultimate madness cast back along the whole stream of his life to darken his sanest thoughts, and explain by this, or by his supposed sexual impotence, his habitual attempts to repress the powerful emotions that were natural to him. Even the circumstances of his birth as a posthumous child and the events of his infancy when he was separated from his mother have been cited as the origin of a lifelong sense of insecurity.

It is not to our purpose to speak further of these matters here. Swift's complex personality and the constant restraints that he placed upon his proud and passionate nature stand in our way if we seek to know the last secrets of his being. His inner spirit baffles even as it fascinates us. He was clearly a great man, and he was an unhappy man. Our concern here has been with the quality of his insight into the life of his age, for it was in the world of men and affairs that Swift established his claim to admiration; it is here that we find the key to his greatness. This great satirist can hold us still, not by literary brilliance alone, but by the depth of experience and the positive grasp of the nature of truth, honesty, and goodness that underlie all he wrote.

<sup>1</sup> F. R. Leavis, "The Irony of Swift," reprinted in *The Common Pursuit* (Chatto and Windus, 1952), p. 86.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1660. Restoration of Stuarts and Episcopacy.  
1667. November 30: Swift born in Dublin of English parents.  
1672. Declaration of Indulgence.  
1673. Test Act.  
c. 1673-82. At Kilkenny School.  
1682. April 24: Entered Trinity College, Dublin, as a pensioner.  
1686. February: Graduated B.A. *speciali gratiâ*.  
1688. Fall of James II. Troubles in Ireland. Swift joins his mother in Leicester.  
1689. June: Entered Sir William Temple's household. Accession of William and Mary. Bill of Rights and Toleration Act.  
1690. May: Returned to Ireland. Battle of the Boyne and Protestant conquest of Ireland.  
1691. August: Rejoined Temple at Moor Park. Early poems.  
1692. July 5: M.A. of Oxford.  
1694. May: Returned to Ireland. October: Ordained deacon.  
1695. January: Ordained priest and appointed to the prebend of Kilroot, near Belfast.  
1696. May: Began third residence with Temple at Moor Park.  
1696-98. *The Battle of the Books* and *A Tale of a Tub* written (published 1704).  
1699. July: Chaplain to Lord Berkeley, Lord Justice of Ireland.  
1700. February: Appointed vicar of Laracor, etc.  
1701. Act of Settlement. February: Swift D.D. of Dublin University. April: Returned to England with Lord Berkeley. *Contests and Dissensions in Athens and Rome*. Taken up by Whigs. Esther Johnson (Stella) settled in Ireland. September: Returned to Ireland.  
1702. Accession of Queen Anne.  
1702-8. Marlborough and Godolphin in power.  
1702-13. War of the Spanish Succession.

1702. April–November: In England.
1703. November 1703–May 1704: Again in England.
1704. Battle of Blenheim. June 1704–November 1707: In Ireland.
1707. Act of Union. November 1707–June 1709: In England seeking remission of first-fruits and twentieths for Irish clergy. Recognized as wit and man of letters. *Letter on the Sacramental Test, Sentiments of a Church-of-England Man* (? 1704), *Argument against Abolishing Christianity, Project for the Advancement of Religion*. Ridiculed Partridge the astrologer.
- 1708–10. Whig Ministry.
1709. July: Returned to Laracor.
1710. September 7: Returned to London. Journal to Stella. October: Introduced to Harley. *The Virtues of Sid Hamet the Magician's Rod* and *A Short Character of the Earl of Wharton*.
- 1710–14. Tory Ministry. November 2, 1710–June 7, 1711: Wrote for *Examiner* in support of Tories.
1711. February 27: *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*. November 27: *The Conduct of the Allies*. December: Marlborough dismissed.
1712. February: *A Proposal for Correcting the English Tongue*. *Letter to the October Club*. Began *The History of the Four Last Years of the Queen*. August: Peace negotiations begun.
1713. April: Treaty of Utrecht. June 13: Installed Dean of St Patrick's, Dublin. September 9: Back in London, trying to reconcile Oxford and Bolingbroke. *Cadenus and Vanessa*.
1714. *The Public Spirit of the Whigs*. The Scriblerus Club. June: Retired to Letcombe, Berkshire. August 1: Death of Anne and collapse of Tories. September: Returned to Ireland.
- 1714–19. Exile in Ireland as Dean of St Patrick's. Irish hostility.
1716. Possibly married Stella.
1720. South Sea Bubble. Came forward as Ireland's champion. *A Letter to a Young Gentleman*. *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*.
1721. Walpole Prime Minister. Began *Gulliver's Travels*.
1722. Patent for copper coinage in Ireland granted to Wood.
1724. March–December: First five *Drapier's Letters*.
1725. August: Withdrawal of Wood's Patent. Finished *Gulliver's Travels*.

1726. March 19–August 15: In London; visited Pope. October 28: *Gulliver's Travels* published.
1727. April–September: Last visit to England. June 24: *Miscellanies In Prose and Verse* (two volumes) of Pope and Swift.
1728. January 28: Death of Stella. *A Short View of the State of Ireland*. March 7: *Miscellanies. The Last (Third) Volume*. June 1728–February 1729: Guest of Sir Arthur Acheson at Market Hill.
1729. Freeman of Dublin. *A Modest Proposal*.
1730. *A Libel on Doctor Delany and a Certain Great Lord*.
1731. *Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift* (published 1739). At work on *Polite Conversation* (published 1738) and *Directions to Servants* (published 1745).
1732. Attacked the Irish bishops and the Presbyterians. October 4: *Miscellanies. The Third (Fourth) Volume*.
1733. *On Poetry, A Rapsody*, attacking Walpole and the Court.
1735. *The Works of J.S. D.D. D.S.P.D. in Four Volumes*, first collected edition, published by Faulkner in Dublin. *Miscellanies, In Prose and Verse. Volume the Fifth*.
1736. Attacked Irish House of Commons in *The Legion Club*.
- c. 1738. Health gave way.
1742. Found to be unsound in mind and memory. Fall of Walpole.
1745. October 19: Died. October 22: Buried in St Patrick's Cathedral.